

**Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn (as prepared)**  
Connected Communities Public Forum on Access and Affordability  
Los Angeles Community Access Network  
May 10, 2017

Let me begin by thanking Alex Nogales, not only for that wonderful introduction, but for investing more than three decades, defending and advancing employment and programming equity, for Latino Americans in the communications space. Your efforts, Alex, benefit us all.

Good evening everyone. I rarely begin a message on a solemn note, but I feel the need to share with you that a small part of me is a little down this evening. I say this, because those forces so entrenched on the other side of the policy debate refuse to listen. If they did, they would witness just how incredible it is to hear from so many people who care about keeping the internet open and free. If they took a few moments to listen, they would gain a better understanding of what preserving consumer privacy protections and ensuring that the public airwaves reflect the diversity of our local communities mean to so many.

But while I may have approached the mic feeling some sorrow over what they are missing here tonight, with each passing moment, as I look at the many faces in this hall, I am increasingly uplifted. I am also incredibly grateful to the Voices for Internet Freedom for organizing today's forum, to the Los Angeles Community Action Network for hosting and to all of the supporting organizations, including Free Press, CMJ, NHMC, Color of Change, 18 Million Rising and Common Cause, for your longstanding advocacy on behalf of consumers. I especially want to thank each and every one of you, for taking time out of your busy day to be part of what promises to be a powerful and interactive discussion.

Now the goal this evening, is one that is really rare: we will allow time for give and take. Too often, there is a whole lot of talk and not enough listening, so we plan to leave time for both. We want to hear from you about how broadband costs may be keeping too many from having service, and if most of the best jobs are posted online and I cannot afford broadband, how will I ever find a job that pays enough to give my family a good life? And how can I utilize technology to see my doctor, without having to transfer across three different bus lines?

And the questions should not stop there. You should also be asking the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the expert agency on communications matters, some tough questions. Is the FCC shirking away from its responsibility to ensure all Americans have affordable access to communications services? Things like affordable broadband service, competition, a free and open internet, viewpoint diversity, just and reasonable phone rates for inmates and their families who need to stay in touch and basic privacy protections. Are these objectives being slowly dismantled under this Administration?

I made a promise to each of you to fight for these protections, and I made a commitment to always put #ConsumersFirst, but you know what? I need help. According to a Consumer Reports survey last year of more than 172,000 subscribers, only about one third of those surveyed, said they are "very or completely satisfied" with their home internet, pay TV or telephone service. As a Commissioner at the agency responsible for overseeing the

communications sector, I find this highly alarming. Why is it that some of the largest communications providers in this country consistently rank among the lowest in consumer satisfaction? Could it possibly have anything to do with a lack of robust competition?

Did you know that when it comes to broadband access at home, just 20 percent of Americans have a choice of two providers or more? Without real competition, are companies really incentivized to improve customer service, service quality, or pricing? And did you know that fewer than 40 percent of families regularly stay in touch with their incarcerated loved ones and one-third of families go bankrupt because of unjust and unreasonable phone rates?

And while we are making progress when it comes to providing faster broadband service, including gigabit speeds in some communities, if it costs \$80 or more a month for service, is broadband truly within reach? Much of our focus has been on what is lacking in rural communities, but there are problems right here in LA and over in the Cleveland, Ohio area. I mention Cleveland because a recent study concluded that a major broadband provider had “systematically discriminated against lower-income neighborhoods, in its deployment of home Internet and video technologies, over the past decade.”

So what that finding makes increasingly clear, is that the broadband availability and affordability gaps are not just in our rural towns and non-urban communities. Those gaps are wide, wherever there is an absence of rich people.

Like you, I do not think low-income families should be ignored by providers just because of where they live. Nor do I think, families should have to choose between paying their water, electric or grocery bill and being able to afford the broadband connectivity needed to do homework, apply for jobs, access government services or stay in touch with a loved one who is serving time.

So here is what I suggest: Tell your stories about what broadband means to you and your family. Let others know what being connected has enabled you to do and how your life would be impacted if you could not access the internet. Tell the FCC that we need Lifeline, a program designed to help those who currently cannot afford telephone or broadband service.

In just a matter of days, the FCC’s majority will tee up an item aimed at dismantling the open internet protections that so many Americans fought for and won back in 2015 – over 4 million comments were filed to be exact. So we cannot afford to remain silent.

In a world without net neutrality, your internet service provider could charge you even more to access your preferred websites, or worse, block those sites all together. Or imagine if your broadband provider, who also happens to own a major Spanish language broadcaster, gives priority access to their website, but slows down the speeds of your favorite but competing website. These are the very real scenarios that could happen, if the FCC’s majority and the big broadband providers get their way.

Finally, I must say something about the state of our media landscape. We are here in the Los Angeles area, the land of tremendous talent and creativity. Yet for many women and persons

of color, turning on the television, presents a picture that is often quite different from our own experiences.

If we agree that localism is an important value to preserve, why did the FCC, with the broadcasters' blessings, just allow your local news to be delivered by a media conglomerate with a reach that could ultimately extend into nearly 80 percent of American households?

Not only do these questions need to be asked but we should be advocating for a tax certificate and incubator programs, that could help improve the diversity of those owning the public airwaves or stations. We should also push for a level playing field for independent cable programmers, many of which cater to audiences too often ignored by large media conglomerates.

If you think these are good ideas, if you have great ideas or concerns of your own, now is your time to make your voice heard. Do not wait until after the vote is taken. Go to our website: [fcc.gov](http://fcc.gov) or call 888-CALL-FCC. And with our phone option, you can also file your comment or complaint in Spanish.

Do not stay silent and accept the absence of broadband competition. No one should be shortchanged because of where they live or how much money they make. Nor should anyone have to face poor customer service or subscribe to a Lifeline program that requires you to pay at least 25 percent of the cost of service.

So my last question to you: Are you willing to stand up, demand from us, and join forces with those who are willing to fight, to ensure you and your families have robust, affordable communications services and that there is a media landscape that reflects the rich diversity found in your community?

Then let's do this. Keep those Voices for Internet Freedom raised and let's lay out a plan on how best to go forward, starting now. Thank you.